

Alumni News

Craig Jessop is the new director of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir

In addition to possessing an absolutely massive talent as a choral conductor, Craig Jessop has displayed an amazing ability throughout his musical career to somehow be the right person at the right place at the right time.

Formerly conductor of the Singing Sergeants (1980 – 1987), deputy commander and then commander/conductor of the United States Air Forces in Europe Band (1987–1991) and commander/conductor of the USAF Heartland of America Band (Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska), Lt Col Jessop received an offer to become associate conductor of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir in Salt Lake City at about the same time the Air Force was offering an early retirement program in 1995.

On October 28, 1999, he had the honor and distinction of being named the 14th conductor in the 132-year history of what is arguably the best known and definitely the most recorded chorus in the world.

Comparing the two choral organizations closest to his heart, Jessop says, "The Singing Sergeants was a smooth, sleek little Ferrari, and this (the Tabernacle Choir) is an elegant, marvelous Bentley — but what an instrument it is of dignity and nobility to drive — I love it!"

Back in 1980, his vision, drive and talent, coupled with a core of talented singer artists either already on board or brought in via audition after his arrival, combined to drive the Singing Sergeants forward to the goal, achieved in a mere seven years, of becoming one of

the world's leading choral ensembles. Twelve years after his departure, the tradition of professionalism and success created by Jessop and his core group of NCOs, remains to this very day and still serves as the cornerstone and foundation upon which the continuing success of the official chorus of the US Air Force is built.

Speaking of being the right person in the right place at the right time, it was Jessop's European assignment which first brought him into contact with choral legend Robert Shaw through Shaw's annual festival in France. That relationship continued and grew for 10 years until Shaw's untimely death early this year.

And sad though the reason be, the relationship will continue when the CD of the Brahms *Requiem* by the Tabernacle Choir and the Utah Symphony on the Telarc label is released — a performance which Shaw was to have conducted in February in Salt Lake City and which Jessop was forced by circumstances to assume.

This choral master considers his Air Force time "just incredible preparation for what I'm doing now." And he remembers fondly his association with his fellow professionals in the Air Force. Starting in Washington, D.C.

and continuing throughout his career in military music, "I had these good Chiefs, and it didn't take long to realize that you will not survive without these NCOs.

"It was always my desire to go back to DC, but when this train (opportunity) came along — this is where my heart — this is where I had to be. But I look back, and the Air Force was exactly, precisely what I needed."

—CMSgt (ret.) Harry Gleeson



Craig D. Jessop, a captain at the time of this photo, with the Singing Sergeants

Editor's note: Based on many letters we have received from past members of the Band, requesting a way to keep abreast of alumni activities, we are adding this new feature to Cadenza. We welcome your input for future articles. CMSgt (ret.) Harry Gleeson, former member and AF Band historian, has generously offered to organize this task. We are grateful for his work on this project.